

Worth A Lot of Sparrows

Jim Elliff

Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? And yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are worth more than many sparrows. Luke 12: 6-7

At two cents per five sparrows, one dollar's worth would buy two hundred and fifty of them. Imagine that!



I once saw a stack of chicken heads in a Bolivian marketplace numbering about that many, all staring one way, eyes fixed. An impressive site, but hardly a means I would be inclined to choose to measure a man's worth. Yet the poor people who buy chicken heads likely consider them even *more* valuable than the pesky, sinewy sky mice called "sparrow." Chicken head soup might be tasty—I really don't know. Yet Jesus picked sparrows instead and said, "You're worth a lot of them."

What a person is worth is no small matter. We live in a culture addicted to self-esteem. We are always wanting to know what we are worth. If everybody despises me, then I feel a certain right to be depressed. Living as a valueless individual sends some people over the bridge or to the institution. So we labor to tell people, "You're worth something to me." Or, we say, "You've misunderstood the way people think of you." And then we try to put into the mouths of the people around the person a reconstruction of what he thinks he is hearing. "They really *do* love you—see!" This becomes an antidote to self-disrespect, which, according to at least one self-esteem guru, is the very definition of depravity.

So, let me help you with your poor self-image: *You're worth more than a lot of sparrows!*

Does that help? Likely not. If I'm worth that to the most significant being of the universe, then take me to the psychiatrist! Obviously self-esteem is not the point. It may be all that can be used for folks in a secular society

that will not esteem God, but it is hardly God's great purpose to make you feel like you're something special. No, we are loved not because we are something "really special" to love, but we are loved even though we are really nothing special at all—like a sparrow. Okay, we are worth more than just a few because humans carry the image of God (though severely distorted because of the Fall), and this is something sparrows don't have, but no one can doubt that Jesus is not going overboard here.

There *is* something special about a Lover like that, however. I recently heard a pastor go to extremes to emphasize that God sees a high intrinsic value in us. He concluded with the statement, "So you see, God really does see something valuable in you that is worth dying for." You could almost feel the value of God's love being diminished in the minds of his hearers as the value of mankind arose. After all, the miracle in this pastor's mind is that God sees what is there all the time. But is this the message of Christ? No, it is not exceptionally worthy people that Jesus loves, but His love is exceptional in that He loves those of no value at all. In fact, he loves us in our sin. Only such a view of love correctly appreciates the sacrifice of Christ and respects the infinite chasm between what is deserved and mercy.

So, let's settle in our minds that Jesus was not giving His disciples this comparison to sparrows in order to make them feel great about themselves. If He had intended that, He would have compared them to something of unusually high value to humans—like the hides of the white Bengal tiger.

Your value, then, is self-initiated by God. Even though you are nothing, He makes you something. Love can do that.

Your value: many sparrows. His love and care: more than you could possibly deserve.

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